

QUAIL UNLIMITED EXTENDS BUFFER INCENTIVE TO 37 MIDDLE TENNESSEE COUNTIES

PRESS RELEASE

The Tennessee Quail Unlimited State Council (TNQU) is paying a one-time \$50 per acre incentive payment on selected native grass buffers established on row cropland in 37 middle Tennessee counties. Practices eligible for the extra TN QU \$50 per acre incentive (above the existing USDA payments and incentives) include Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) CP33 Habitat Buffers for Upland Birds, native grass CP21 Filter Strips, CP22 Riparian Forest Buffer native grass Zone 3 acres, and PL319 Small Watershed native grass field borders and buffers.

These additional monies were made available through a grant provided by the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), working in cooperation with the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and Quail Unlimited, Inc. Several local QU chapters have provided funding to allow the incentives to be offered throughout middle Tennessee.

TNQU funds available for the \$50 incentives are limited, and will be obligated on a first-come, first-served basis until funds are exhausted. To be eligible for the Quail Unlimited incentive payment, landowners must first apply at the Farm Services Agency office in the eligible counties. Once the offer has been accepted by USDA and a contract signed, the TNQU incentive funds will be paid. Applications for these practices submitted to USDA prior to November 1, 2005 are not eligible for the TNQU incentive.

Currently, the USDA is in a continuous signup for CRP buffer practices. This type of USDA signup allows landowners to enroll land automatically into the CRP program without a competitive bid process, if certain land eligibility criteria are met. CP33 Habitat Buffers are native grass field borders that are established around the perimeter of cropland fields. Filter strips are grass strips that are established on the edge of cropped areas adjacent to streams and rivers. Riparian Forest Buffer Zone 3's are native grass borders adjacent to the streamside tree zone. While enrolled in CRP, landowners also receive USDA annual payments per acre and cost-share payments for establishing these buffer practices. In addition, USDA currently has Signing Incentive Payments (SIP) for the mentioned CRP practices of \$100 per acre for 10-year contracts, and \$150 per acre for 15-year contracts, so landowners taking advantage of the TNQU incentive would receive combined incentive payments of \$150 or \$200 per acre enrolled. The USDA SIP payments are made to the landowner once the contract has been signed.

Native warm season grasses eligible for the TNQU incentive payment include switchgrass, big bluestem, little bluestem, sideoats grama, and indiangrass, with some legumes included. These grasses and forbs offer excellent habitat to a wide range of wildlife, especially ground nesting birds like the northern bobwhite, wild turkey, and some songbirds. "Native grass acres in CRP are helping bobwhites and rabbits make a comeback in some west Tennessee areas. "We're hoping we can get enough acres on the ground in these selected middle Tennessee counties that we can make a difference here, too", stated Chris Wolkonowski, NRCS Private Lands Wildlife Biologist. "Quail Unlimited is committed to helping the TWRA, USDA, and other agencies improve habitat for quail across the state, and feel our incentive payments are one way to help landowners put habitat on the ground," noted Tony Phillips, TNQU State Council Chairman.

Since the TNQU incentive funding is limited, landowners are encouraged to apply soon through their local USDA Service Center in the 37 middle Tennessee counties. For more information, contact Chris Wolkonowski, USDA-NRCS Biologist (615-893-9295 EXT 112), or Mark Gudlin, Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (615-781-6614), or visit www.TWRAprivatelands.org.